

A FIRE ASSEMBLY FOR RECESSED LIGHT FIXTURES

Field of the Invention

5 The present invention generally relates to a fire
assembly that can be used to install recessed light
fixtures into various structures. More particularly,
the present invention is directed to a fire assembly
comprising a housing and a recessed light fixture that
10 is configured to maintain the fire rating of a floor-
ceiling assembly when installed.

Background of the Invention

15 Current residential buildings, such as
apartments, assisted living housing developments, or
condominiums, can be constructed in a variety of ways.
Regardless of the manner of construction, however, the
building must generally comply with certain fire
safety standards, such as set forth by Underwriters
Laboratories ("UL"). For example, wood joists and
20 sheet rock are typically used to create a residential-
like atmosphere. When using such materials, the
building structure must typically satisfy a specific
UL "fire-rated" floor assembly standard. For example,
one applicable test is UL's 1 hr. Fire Rated L-500
25 Floor-Ceiling Assembly test. This test measures and
rates a given floor-ceiling assembly for fire safety
compliance.

30 Very often, it is desired to install various
accessories into building structures. For example,
due to their aesthetic appearance, recessed lighting
fixtures are commonly installed into residential and
commercial building structures. A recess lighting
fixture typically includes a light element surrounded

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by a light housing, often referred to as a "can". When installing a recessed lighting fixture, a hole must generally be cut into the ceiling. Once the hole is cut, the recessed lighting fixture can be attached to a joist above the ceiling. As a result, the recessed lighting fixture is positioned above the surface to distribute light therefrom.

However, one problem associated with installing recessed lighting fixtures in such a manner is that the hole cut in the ceiling can change the fire safety requirements of the floor-ceiling assembly. In particular, the ceiling structure is typically tested by UL prior to installing such recessed lighting fixtures. By cutting a hole in the ceiling, a non-continuous surface can result and the floor-ceiling assembly may no longer satisfy certain fire safety standards.

To overcome this problem, current builders have begun to fabricate separate boxes ("fire boxes") around the recessed lighting fixtures just prior to installation to create a continuous ceiling surface. Most building inspectors interpret such a continuous ceiling surface as complying with all applicable fire standards. However, because these fire boxes are unattached and must be fabricated by the builder separately from the lighting fixture, a substantial amount of additional time and expense can be incurred. Moreover, because most builders are unaware of what size box is required for fire safety, exceedingly large boxes have often been utilized, causing unneeded cost and expense.

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DISCUSSION

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According to the present invention, the fire assembly can also include a housing that encloses the recessed light fixture. In general, the housing, or fire box, can have any desired shape or size, so long as the housing is capable of providing a continuous fire wall when installed into a floor-ceiling assembly (e.g. a ceiling surface). A continuous surface can result when the housing is placed above an opening in the surface of a ceiling such that the opening is substantially covered by the housing. For instance, in one embodiment, the housing can comprise a cube-shaped box having a plurality of side walls and a top wall. In another embodiment, the cube-shaped box can also include a bottom wall. The bottom wall can, in some embodiments, define a hole that corresponds to the hole cut into the ceiling surface.

Typically, a housing of the present invention is generally fire-resistant such that it can impart some fire protection to the recessed lighting fixture and maintain the fire rating of the floor-ceiling assembly. For example, in one embodiment, a housing wall can contain at least one generally fire-resistant material. Examples of generally fire-resistant materials include, but are not limited to, dry wall or wallboard (e.g. sheet rock, plywood, asbestos cement sheets, gypsum plasterboard, laminated plastics, etc.), and plaster. In some embodiments of the present invention, the housing walls can contain more than one layer of material. For instance, in one embodiment, each housing wall can contain two layers of sheet rock material. Moreover, in other embodiments, other materials can also be attached to

the generally fire-resistant materials. For instance, in one embodiment, each housing wall can contain an outer layer of sheet rock material attached to an inner layer of aluminum.

5 In general, any suitable method of attachment can be utilized to attach various walls and/or wall layers in accordance with the present invention. For instance, in one embodiment, an outer layer of sheet rock can be mechanically attached (e.g. screws) to an inner layer of aluminum to form one housing wall. In 10 another embodiment, an outer layer of sheet rock can be adhesively attached to an inner layer of sheet rock to form a housing wall. Furthermore, in other embodiments, the walls can be attached using various attachment methods, such as mechanical or adhesive 15 methods. For example, in one embodiment, a top wall can be adhesively attached to four side walls to form a cube-shaped fire box of the present invention.

20 In accordance with the present invention, various mechanisms can be utilized to connect the housing to the recessed light fixture such that an integral structure can be formed. For example, in one embodiment, a support structure can be provided to attach to both the recessed light fixture and the 25 housing. In particular, a support structure, such as a metal frame, can first be attached to the outer surfaces of the recessed lighting fixture. Thereafter, the housing can be attached to the support structure such that an integral structure is formed by 30 the attachment of the recessed light fixture, support structure, and housing. When attaching the support structure to the housing or recessed light fixture,

any method of attachment known in the art, such as described above, can be utilized. It should be understood that various other mechanisms can be utilized to connect the recessed light fixture to a housing of the present invention. Moreover, in some embodiments, the recessed light fixture can be directly attached to the housing to form a fire assembly having an integral structure.

In some embodiments, a fire assembly of the present invention can also include a junction box for wiring the recessed light fixture. For instance, in one embodiment, the junction box can be contained within the housing. Moreover, in another embodiment, the junction box can be positioned outside the housing on a portion of the bottom wall of the housing extending beyond the intersection of the bottom wall and one of the side walls. Regardless of the position of the junction box, at least one conduit can be provided that can extend from the junction box to another conduit of another fire assembly or recessed light fixture. Consequently, such a conduit(s) can allow a fire assembly of the present invention to be easily connected to various other light fixtures within a building structure.

Other objects, features and aspects of the present invention are discussed in greater detail below.

Brief Description of the Drawings

A full and enabling disclosure of the present invention, including the best mode thereof, directed to one of ordinary skill in the art, is set forth in the specification, which makes reference to the

Figure 1 is a perspective view of one embodiment of a fire assembly of the present invention;

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Detailed Description of the Invention

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another embodiment to yield a still further embodiment. Thus, it is intended that the present invention cover such modifications and variations as come within the scope of the appended claims and their equivalents. Other objects, features and aspects of the present invention are disclosed in or are obvious from the following detailed description. It is to be understood by one of ordinary skill in the art that the present discussion is a description of exemplary embodiments only, and is not intended as limiting the broader aspects of the present invention.

In general, the present invention is directed to a fire assembly that can be more easily installed into a floor-ceiling assembly. In particular, a fire assembly of the present invention includes a recessed light fixture enclosed within a housing, or fire box, such that the entire assembly can form an integral structure and be sold and installed as a single unit. Moreover, it has been discovered that a fire assembly of the present invention not only imparts some fire protection to the recessed lighting fixture, but can also maintain the fire rating of the floor-ceiling assembly.

Referring to Figure 1, one embodiment of a fire assembly 10 of the present invention is depicted. As shown, fire assembly 10 includes a light fixture 20 contained within a housing formed by various fire-resistant walls. In general, light fixture 20 can include any type of light fixture known in the art, such as recessed light fixtures. In one embodiment, light fixture 20 can include a cylindrical reflector (or "can") having one or more incandescent or

flourescent lighting elements contained therein. For example, as shown in Figure 3, a single incandescent lamp 121 can be contained within a light fixture 120 to distribute light below ceiling 112.

5 Light fixtures 20 or 120 can also generally have any of a variety of shapes and sizes. For instance, as shown in Figures 1-5, light fixture 20 can be formed such that it opens at the ceiling surface and is recessed thereabove. Moreover, as shown, light
10 fixture 20 can have a substantially cylindrical shape defining a circular opening at its bottom section and being enclosed at its top section. Other suitable forms of recessed light fixtures that can be used in the present invention include, but are not limited to,
15 the fixtures described in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,758,959 to Sieczkowski; 5,857,766 to Sieczkowski; and 6,004,011 to Sieczkowski. In addition, recessed lighting fixtures of the present invention can contain any of a variety of types and shapes of light elements
20 or lamps. For example, the recessed lighting fixture can have a shape that is round, square, rectangular, etc. Moreover, the lighting element can also contain different types of lamps, such as incandescent, flourescent, High Intensity Discharge ("HID"), etc.

25 In accordance with the present invention, the fire assembly can also generally include a housing used to enclose the light fixture. Depending on the particular application, the housing can be physically separated from or integrally connected to the recessed
30 lighting fixture. Thus, a fire assembly of the present invention can be sold and installed as a single, integral unit, or can also be sold and

installed as separate units. When physically separated, the housing and recessed lighting fixture may or may not be later attached during installation. It should be understood that although the use of a housing that is separate from the recessed lighting fixture can provide many benefits, it is typically preferred that the fire assembly be formed as an integral unit.

Referring to Figure 1, for instance, a housing of the present invention can include four side walls 30, 32, 34, and 36. Each of the four side walls can be formed into a cube-shaped fire box by attaching a top and/or bottom wall thereto. Although the housing is depicted and described herein as having a cube shape (e.g. box), it should be understood that a housing of the present invention can also have any other shape or dimension, and contain any number of walls, so long as the housing extends from the ceiling to form a substantially continuous surface therewith. For example, in an alternative embodiment, the housing can have a cylindrical shape.

As shown in Figure 2, a top wall 33 can be placed above light fixture 20 and attached to the side walls by any method known in the art. Moreover, a bottom wall 38 can be placed under light fixture 20 and further attached to the side walls by any method known in the art. As illustrated, bottom wall 38 can define a circular opening corresponding to the cylindrical reflector of the light fixture so that light fixture 20 can distribute light therethrough. In some embodiments, as shown in Figures 1-3, a decorative flange 48 (148 in Fig. 3) can also be inserted into

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R/ the opening of bottom wall 38 (138 in Fig. 3) to attach to light fixture 20 (120 in Fig. 3) and improve the aesthetics of the fire assembly.

In general, the housing walls of the present invention can be made from any of a variety of materials. Examples of generally fire-resistant materials include, but are not limited to, dry wall or wallboard (e.g. sheet rock, plywood, asbestos cement sheets, gypsum plasterboard, laminated plastics, etc.), and plaster. In particular, a housing wall of the present invention typically comprises at least one material that is generally fire-resistant, although the wall may also contain other materials that are not fire-resistant. For instance, in one embodiment, as shown in Figure 1, side walls 30, 32, 34, 36; bottom wall 38; and the top wall (not shown), can comprise a dry wall or wallboard material. However, it should be understood that the fire box walls need not comprise the same material.

In some embodiments, one or more walls of the housing can also comprise multiple layers of material. In general, each layer of a multi-layered wall can comprise any of a variety of fire-resistant and/or non-fire-resistant materials. For instance, referring to Figure 2, one embodiment of the present invention includes a fire box having walls made from two layers of dry wall. As shown, side wall outer layers 30b 32b, 34b, and 36b can be attached to dry wall, side wall inner layers 30a, 32a, 34a, and 36a (not shown), respectively. In this embodiment, the inner layers of material have smaller dimensions than the outer layers attached thereto. Although not required, such smaller

dimensions can often minimize the amount of material required, and thus, decrease manufacturing costs.

In addition, besides generally fire-resistant materials, a wall of the present invention can also contain other materials, such as aluminum, to help ensure that the fire rating of the floor-ceiling assembly is maintained. Referring to Figure 3, another embodiment of a multi-layered housing of the present invention is depicted. In this embodiment, fire assembly 110 includes a fire box having four side wall inner layers 130a, 132a, 134a, and 136a, as well as top wall inner layer 133a and bottom wall inner layer 138a, each of which are made from aluminum. The aluminum housing forms a support structure for the outer layers. The aluminum walls also act as a heat shield for the lamp. As shown, each aluminum wall can be attached to a corresponding sheet rock layer to provide a multi-layered fire box structure. For example, side wall inner layer 130a can be attached to a side wall outer layer 130b made from dry wall. Moreover, although not specifically depicted, the aluminum inner layers can also be attached to a metal frame or other structure.

When multiple layers are utilized to form one or more walls of a fire box of the present invention, any suitable method of attachment known in the art can be used for attaching the layers. For instance, in one embodiment, an adhesive can be used to attach the layers. Moreover, in another embodiment, the layers can be attached mechanically through screws or other types of fasteners. For example, as shown in Figure 3, screws 150 can be utilized to attach together the

layers of each wall, as well as the walls themselves.

Regardless of the number of layers utilized, a fire wall of the present invention can generally have any desired thickness. For instance, a thicker fire wall can sometimes provide better fire protection, while a thinner fire wall can often lower production costs. In one embodiment, for example, a 5/8" layer of sheet rock can be utilized to form a fire assembly of the present invention. In another embodiment, two 5/8" layers of sheet rock can be utilized.

According to the present invention, as mentioned above, the fire assembly can also contain a support structure for attaching to a light fixture. Although not required, a support structure of the present invention can help ensure that the light fixture remains stable within the fire assembly. In general, a support structure of the present invention can have any shape or dimension, or comprise any material, so long as such structure is capable of effectively attaching to a light fixture. As shown in Figure 2, one embodiment of the present invention includes support structure 50 that can be utilized to stabilize the movement of light fixture 20 within fire assembly 10. In this embodiment, for example, support structure 50 is a metal frame to which light fixture 20 can be attached by any method known in the art. As stated, it should be understood that a support structure of the present invention need not be a frame, and that the support structure can also have a variety of other shapes, such as the aluminum housing illustrated in Figure 3.

When utilized, the support structure is typically

attached to the walls of the fire box such that a fire assembly having an integral structure can be formed. For instance, as shown in Fig. 1., the fire box walls can be attached by any method known in the art to support frame 50. Moreover, as shown in Fig. 3, outer wall layers 130b, 132b (not shown), 133b, 134b (not shown), 136b, and 138b, can be attached via screws 150 to inner wall layers 130a, 132a (not shown), 133a, 134a (not shown), 136a, and 138a, respectively. It should be understood, however, that a support structure is not required to attach the light fixture to the fire box walls, as long as the overall fire assembly forms an integral structure. In fact, the light fixture could be directly affixed to one or more of the fire box walls, or attached thereto through some other mechanism besides a support structure.

In some embodiments, various mechanisms can be utilized to minimize the transfer of heat through the fire assembly to further ensure that the fire rating of the floor-ceiling assembly is adequately maintained. For example, in one embodiment, a gasket material can be inserted between the bottom wall of the fire box and the ceiling. In general, the gasket material can comprise any of a variety of materials, such as fiberglass, foam, rubber, etc. For instance, in one embodiment, as shown in Figs. 1-2, a fiberglass gasket 35 can be inserted between bottom wall 38 and ceiling surface 12. As shown, gasket 35 can define a hole that corresponds with the hole of bottom wall 38 and the diameter of light fixture 20.

In addition, a fire assembly of the present invention can also be equipped with any mechanism to

attach the fire assembly to a floor-ceiling assembly. For example, in one embodiment, one or more bar hangers can be used to attach the fire assembly to a ceiling joist. For instance, as shown in Figures 1-2, bar hangers 18 can be affixed to support structure 50 by any suitable attachment mechanism, such as screws or other fasteners. As shown, bar hangers 18 are adjustable such that they can extend to attach to opposing ceiling joists 14 (one of which is shown in Figure 1). It should be understood, however, that the fire assembly may be constructed, and may attach to the ceiling, in any suitable manner. For example, the brackets may attach to T-bars rather than joists.

In most embodiments, a junction box can also be provided to allow an electrician or other suitable technician to correctly wire the light fixture. For instance, as shown in Figure 2, wires from light fixture 20 can be placed in electrical communication with junction box 44 through conduit 46. Conduit 46 can generally be made from any material, such as flexible or rigid pipes, capable of safely enclosing electrical wires contained therein. In some embodiments, junction box 44 can be mounted to the bottom wall of the fire box such that it remains stationary with respect thereto, while in other embodiments, junction 44 can be allowed to hang free (not shown). Furthermore, although not depicted, some embodiments of the present invention can also provide for the attachment of junction box 44 to light fixture 20.

In addition, referring to Figure 3, another embodiment of the present invention also includes one

or more conduits to facilitate the electrical attachment of the fire assembly to other assemblies or light fixtures. As shown, junction box 144 can be provided with conduits 210 and 212 extending in a substantially planar direction from junction box 144. In one embodiment, for example, the conduits can comprise $\frac{1}{2}$ " IP piping. In general, conduits of the present invention can function to hold wires for electrically attaching one fire assembly to another fire assembly or light fixture. In particular, a clamp 220 can be attached to conduit 212, for example, such that conduit 212 can be connected to another conduit of another fire assembly or recessed light fixture. The screws of clamp 220 can be tightened or loosened such that the clamp is capable of better attaching conduit 212 to another conduit. One example of a clamp that is suitable for use in the present invention is a "ROMEX" clamp. It should be understood, however, that the present invention is not limited to the use of clamps, and that any other suitable connection device, such as plugs, can be used.

In some embodiments, it may be necessary to seal the conduits to ensure fire safety. For example, as shown in Figure 3, a portion of the conduit can sometimes extend outside fire assembly 110. Thus, in order to ensure fire safety compliance, it may be desired to seal those portions of the conduit located outside the assembly. For instance, sealants, such as joint dry wall compound, joint tape, or combinations thereof, can be used to seal the portions of the conduit extending outside of the fire assembly. In

addition, it may also be desired to seal the opening in the fire box wall through which a conduit is inserted. In particular, the point at which the conduits extend through the walls of the fire box walls can be sealed by any method known in the art, including, for example, fire caulking.

In accordance with the present invention, a fire assembly of the present invention can also include various mechanisms to provide access to the light fixture and/or junction box for wiring by an electrician. For instance, Figures 4 and 5 are directed to a further embodiment of a fire assembly generally 310 made in accordance with the present invention. In particular, Figure 5 is an exploded view of the entire fire assembly, while Figure 4 illustrates a support structure generally 350 incorporated into the fire assembly. In this embodiment, support structure 350 includes a bottom plate 315 extending outwardly from bottom wall 338. As shown, the fire assembly can include a junction box 344 positioned on plate 315 to provide an electrician with easy access thereto. Junction box 344 can be placed in electrical communication with the light fixture (not shown) by conduit 346. Conduit 346 can extend through a fire box wall and through the support structure. As stated above, such an opening can be appropriately sealed using any sealing methods known in the art.

In some embodiments, a fire assembly of the present invention can also include at least one fire box wall equipped with a door or other mechanism capable of opening and closing. For instance, as

shown in Figs. 4-5, fire box assembly 310 can include a door 312 in support structure 350 and a corresponding door 313 in wall 336 that can be utilized by a technician to access the junction box from the light fixture. In particular, doors 312 and 315 can remain closed until access is required so that proper wire connections for the lighting fixture and junction box are maintained.

The present invention may be better understood by reference to the following example.

EXAMPLE

The ability of a fire assembly of the present invention to maintain the fire rating of a floor-ceiling assembly was demonstrated. Initially, a fire assembly was formed as described above. In particular, a cube-shaped housing was formed by attaching four side walls and a top wall. Each wall contained sheet rock as the generally fire resistant material. The cube-shaped housing was then attached to a metallic support structure. To complete the fire assembly, the support structure and housing were subsequently attached to an incandescent recessed lighting fixture to form the fire assembly.

Once formed, the fire assembly was then tested according to UL standards. In particular, a 48-inch by 48-inch small scale floor-ceiling assembly was constructed as described in Design No. L501, which is set forth in UL's 1999 Fire Resistance Directory and illustrated in Figure 6. As shown in Figure 6, the fire assembly was installed in a joist cavity while an adjoining joist cavity remained unchanged. As also shown in Figure 6, various thermocouples were then

positioned within the floor-ceiling assembly.

The small scale floor-ceiling assembly and fire assembly were then fire tested in accordance with the Standard, ANSI/UL 263 (ASTM E 119), as described in
5 UL's 1999 Fire Resistant Directory. In particular, the fire test included exposing the floor-ceiling assembly to an open flame evenly distributed across the ceiling's surface. During testing, the temperatures at several locations on the lumber joists
10 and on the underside of the plywood flooring in each of the two joist cavities were measured according to the thermocouple locations indicated in Figure 6. The test was conducted for a period of approximately 1 hour. During testing, the temperature of the joist
15 cavity where the fire assembly of the present invention was installed was compared to the temperature of the joist cavity containing no such fixture. In order to pass the fire test, it is necessary that the temperatures measured in the joist
20 cavity with the recessed incandescent light fixture be no more than 5% hotter than the temperatures measured in the joist cavity without the light fixture.

After the period of fire exposure, it was determined that the fire assembly of the present
25 invention adequately complied with the applicable UL standard. In fact, it was unexpectedly discovered that the joist cavity containing the recessed light fixture actually remained cooler than the adjoining joist cavity. Although unknown, it is believed that
30 the fire assembly of the present invention provides more surface area in order to dissipate the heat.

These and other modifications and variations to

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the present invention may be practiced by those of ordinary skill in the art, without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention, which is more particularly set forth in the appended claims.

5 In addition, it should be understood that aspects of the various embodiments may be interchanged both in whole or in part. Furthermore, those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the foregoing description is by way of example only, and is not
10 intended to limit the invention so further described in such appended claims.

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